

A LEGEND OF OLD PERSIA
AND OTHER POEMS.

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A LEGEND OF OLD PERSIA
AND OTHER POEMS.
BY A. B. S. TENNYSON.

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TO
C. T.

Fantasies.

Altruism : A Legend of Old
Persia : p. 3.
The Enchanted Gipsy : p. 9.
The Roof of the World :
p. 11.

The Poet and the Lily :
p. 13.
The Tramp : p. 15.
The Black Dwarf : p. 23.
To an Elephant : p. 24.

Songs.

The Palmer's Song : p. 27.
The Song of the Old Men :
p. 28.
The Song of Snorro : p.
30.

The Island : p. 32.
Fair Filamelle : p. 34.
The Song of Kisses : p. 35.
The Song of Odysseus :
p. 36.

Stories in Verse.

Adeimantus : p. 41.
Pygmalion : p. 44.
Alexis : p. 53.
The King's Cloak : p. 56.

The Knight and the Witch :
p. 59.
The Dreamer : 66.

Dialogues.

The Parting of Lancelot and
Guinevere : p. 77.
The Hermit and the Faun :
p. 80.

Love's Defence : p. 85.
The Playmates : p. 87.

Dramas.

June and November : p. 91.	The Wraith : p. 101.
A Foolish Tragedy : p. 92.	The Two Murderers : p.
Alone : p. 94.	102.

Reflections.

The Wind and the Hills : p. 107.	A Question : p. 112.
The Happy Ones : p. 110.	The Earth : p. 113.
	Aspirations : p. 114.
	Romance : p. 115.

Of the poems in this volume "Adeimantus" and "The Hermit and the Faun" first appeared in THE CONTEMPORARY REVIEW, and "The Song of Snorro" in THE SPECTATOR. They are re-published here by kind permission of the Editors.

FANTASIES.

Altruism : A Legend of Old Persia.'

In the flowery land of Persia
Long ago, as poets tell,
Where three rivers met together
Did a happy people dwell.
Never did these happy people
Suffer sickness, plague, or dearth,
Living in a golden climate
In the fairest place on earth,
Living thus thro' endless summers
And half-summers hardly colder,
Growing, tho' they hardly guessed it,
Very gradually older.

I can very well imagine
These old Persian lords and ladies
Sitting in their pleasant gardens,
Dreaming, dozing, where the shade is ;
Almond trees a mass of blossom,
Roses, roses, red as wine,
With the helmets of the tulips
Flaming in a martial line,
While beside a marble basin,
With a fountain gushing forth,
Stands a red-legged crane, alighted
From the deserts of the North.

So they lived these ancient people,
With the happy harmless faces,
Dreaming till the purple twilight
In their flowery garden-places,

Finding every year the sunshine
And the wind a little colder,
Growing, tho' they hardly guessed it,
Very gradually older,
Till at last they grew so frail
That to their gardens they were carried,
Very feeble and exhausted,
Weak as babes—But still they tarried,

Lying till the purple twilight
Wrapped in wool but hardly warm,
Wearing shawls of costliest texture
Lest the wind might do them harm,
Feeling very faint sensations
Of delight in each old breast,
Twittering with tiny voices
Like young swallows in a nest.
Then the young men spoke together
As they feasted in the taverns,
“It is time to take our Fathers,
We must bear them to the Caverns.”

In a mountain were the Caverns,
Fourteen leagues across the sand,
Fourteen leagues across the desert
In a naked golden land.
Black and bold and bare the mountain
Modelled into many shapes,
Cones and pyramids and pillars,
Beetling cliffs and jutting capes.

And within it were the Caverns
Tunnelled into every part,
Some by ancient Persian devils,
Others by a modern art.

Where the terraced lawns lay dreaming,
Underneath a cedar-tree
Dozed an ancient, ancient person
Tiny as a child of three.

very day a gobbling negro
To his place the old man carried ;
Very feeble and exhausted
Did he seem—but still he tarried.
Then Hasan, the young lord, murmured,
As he feasted in the taverns,
“It is time to take my Father,
I must bear him to the Caverns.”

So he took his long-maned pony,
Her who wore the silver shoes,
Galloped thro' the crowded highways
Like one with no time to lose.
Purpose in his warning outcry
(Was he not the next of kin ?)
Till he reached his palace gateway,
Flung the rein and fled within,
Chose with care a wicker basket
Very strong and deep and wide,
Laying shawls of costliest texture
And an eider quilt inside.

Underneath the spreading cedar,
In an arbour newly built,
Found Hasan his ancient person,
Put him underneath the quilt,
Mounted then his long-maned pony
With the basket on his arm,
Carrying it very firmly
Lest his father might take harm.
Galloped thro' the crowded highway,
Passing by the Street of Taverns,
Fourteen leagues across the desert
Till he came unto the Caverns.

Fastened then his long-maned pony
To a ring-post at the mouth
(Scores and scores of ring-posts were there
Where the Caverns faced the South)
Plunged within the long wide gallery
Tunnelled 'neath the rocky roof,
With a lantern light exploring
All the dark which lay aloof,
Treading swiftly, treading surely,
With the basket on his arm,
Carrying it very firmly
Lest his father might take harm.

Till he came a byway unto
Fashioned from another way,
And ~~a niche~~ seen at the summit
Of a guiding lantern ray.
Lifted then the basket gently,
Poised, and placed it in the niche,

Saying "Farewell, ancient father,
'Tis the custom" . . . after which
Bowed his head before his father
Thrice, and swiftly turned to go,
Knowing that it was the custom,
Thinking it was better so.

Suddenly he heard a droning,
Like a gnat's small plaintive lay,
Somewhere in the dark behind him
Where the "Ancient Persons" lay,
Heard a little ghostly twitter
Like a voice addressing him,
Turned and saw his father staring
Just above the basket rim,
Staring at Hasan, his strong son,
With his filmy red-rimmed eyes,
"What's ado, Oh! ancient father?"
Cried Hasan in great surprise.

"Son," replied the ancient person,
"Tho' a miser is disgraced,
Even in a wealthy household
Monstrous is the crime of waste,
Strong and shapely is the basket
Much hath held and more will take;
If you leave it in the Caverns
Won't it be a great mistake?
So, for once, let custom perish . . .
Son, 'tis I, your father, ask it,
Lift me out and lay me gently
On the rock and . . . take our basket."

Oh ! the young lord's wild amazement
As he heard that tiny hum ;
Turned the lantern light behind him
Stricken with amazement dumb.
Oh ! the young lord's vast confusion
As its meaning gave a flicker—
Oh ! the mild iconoclastic
Staring o'er the edge of wicker.
Staring—staring—simply staring
With his filmy red-rimmed eyes—
Down Hasan his father lifted
Silent still in strange surmise.

Never faster had prince ridden
From the place of Persian devils,
Where its huge and inky bastions
Frowned across the golden levels ;
Nor before had faster travelled
Scion of the equine brood
Than that day, that day of portent,
Galloped she the silver-shoed.
Saw Hasan the meaning clearly
And a prophet (so they said)
After sunset thro' the taverns
Loud proclaimed the custom dead.

This a legend of old Persia
Of an earlier happier day
Of a ~~happy~~ happy people—
How they ended none can say.

The Enchanted Gipsy.

“Gilda, Gilda, my ragged child,
Where have you been,
In the lane, the green lane, or the heather,
My little queen?”

“Honey mother, sweet little mother,
Oh! my old grey mummy,
It's the blood of berries on my skirt
Makes me look rummy.”

“There is no juice on your coral lips,
Your amber eyes are wild,
And why do you dance like an angry jay,
My fairy child?”

“I can tell, I can tell,
Oh! my delicate mam,
I dance to the tune of a blue-bell,
Which told me what I am.”

“Gilda, Gilda, my lovely child,
Say how it spoke,
There is nothing well in a flower's spell
On one of our folk.”

“Oh! my pet, my beautiful heart,
Oh! my cunning mummy,
My cousin the sun and the wind have begun,
That's why I look rummy.”

“ I have known one since I have begun,
I have known a dozen,
But never I knew a girl was true
Who called *them* cousin.”

“ Oh ! my mam, my delicate mam,
Do not scold your daughter,
I only went to the Witch’s pool
And looked in the water.”

“ Oh ! my dove, my beautiful elf,
Was the water clear as heaven,
Did you weave a crown of flowers for yourself,
In the magic of even ? ”

“ Oh ! my mother, my honey mother,
The water was heaven-clear,
I wove a crown of marigolds . . .
But why do you look so queer ? ”

“ Oh ! my girl, my pitiful girl,
Good-bye to your happy hours,
The Curse of the Pool is on you . . .
Your ways are not ours.”

The Roof of the World.

“Ere the first blush of morning’s rose
Had reddened the eternal snows,
I plunged the pines among,
And came down thro’ the forest sons
In their deep-ranked battalions
With practised steps and strong.

“Then heard I from the plateau rock
A lowing cow and a crowing cock—
Thin sounds in upper air.
And far below at the valley’s end
I saw the morning smoke ascend
That showed me men were there.

“Ho! you lads, arouse, arouse!
He is descended to your house
Of whom wild legend ran.
On the roof of the world I dwelt five year,
Go, tell your master I am here
To be his serving-man.

“Ho! all you folk, I climbed above
The boundaries of hate and love.
Ho! such an one was I—
The wind it whistled to my bone.
I was alone, alone, alone
With the mountains and the sky.

“It is a timeless land and still;
The heavens slowly like a wheel

Revolve themselves around ;
There are two rulers in that place ;
Eternity sits throned by space ;
Their law is without sound.

“Ho ! you folk, such feats I did
On the world’s roof the snow amid,
Ho ! such an one as I—
I matched the wild goat in my race,
And underneath the long wise face
I pulled the beard awry.

“Five years I sported undismayed,
But suddenly I was afraid,
Yea, fearfully amazed.
I saw the eye of a dying hare ;
Infinity was mirrored there
Ere it was wholly glazed.

“And this shall be my daily good,
To draw your water, hew your wood,
And lighten all your need ;
To do your sowing and your tilling ;
But to be bright and always willing,
And have no other creed.”

All bronzed and bearded was his face ;
He had a rapture and a grace
From living in the wild ;
As he stared around and strangely spoke
He looked not like other folk,
But as an eager child.

The Poet and the Lily.

A poet was born in a modern time,
'Neath Saturn and his Rings,
He was a child of the world's prime,
Knew all beautiful things.
He was a child of morning and mirth,
Laughing for joy of the sun,
His nostrils drank the scent of earth
When rain is over and done.

A lily came from the winter's womb
And grew in its own sweet pride,
But the ruthless steel passed over its bloom,
And low in the dust it died.
And the poet's heart was filled with pain
That a delicate thing and rare
Should be reft of the beauty of which it was fain
And killed by the cruel share.

So he sang of the meadows white with lambs,
And life all young again,
Of the colts which gallop to their dams,
Knowing not any rein.
He sang of the spring upon the sea,
Hedges all white with may,
The year in its sweet infancy,
This our great world at play.

Of shepherds piping to their flocks
Across the fields of thyme,
Of sunlit fields above the rocks,

Where the small waves lap in rhyme.
Of glancing maids and youths their peers,
For ever young and free,
With faces fair, and in their ears
Great music of the sea.

He sang the amber moon a-sail
In an even of misty blue,
The stars which burn, the stars which pale,
The might which holds them true ;
The comets in another sky
Which sweep to an unknown morn.
He sang of some vast agony
Or ever a world was born.

He sang a song like a twanging bow,
His head was full of sound
As a dark night when winds are low
And a swell comes from the ground.
He sang a song like a joyous bird
In wooded places and hilly,
While in the hearts of those that heard
Pity grew like a lily.

The Tramp.

Forth from the ill-lit tavern door
Where he had snoozed and boozed before
Stumbled his shambling feet.
A candle gave a guttering light,
And some one growled a hoarse good-night . . .
The Tramp was in the street.

His boots were blistered, burst and patched,
He had a mildewed hat, which matched
His green, unlovely coat.
Once, too, he caught his foot and swore,
And, tho' the night was warm, he wore
A muffler at his throat.

And as he went his two lips moved
As if he muttered songs he loved
To an old, unquiet tune ;
And as he went his eyes were glazed,
Twice, too, he paused like some one dazed
And hiccoughed at the moon.

Thus thro' the empty ways he passed
Until he reached the road at last
With fields at either hand,
And in the heavens bare and bright
The moon stood high and shed her light
Upon the silent land.

And lo ! hard by, a lofty rick,
No chance was there of stab or prick,

It makes a pleasant bed.
And so, within, he burrowed deep,
And then upon a fragrant heap
He laid his unclean head.

The moon was swallowed by a cloud,
A nightingale sang sweet and loud
From the middle of a wood ;
From its small body swelled a strain
Which flooded all the listening plain.
It trembled as it stood.

Upon his hay the Tramp awoke,
The golden fountain never broke,
The lovely sobbing strain.
The melody of that brown bird
Awoke a delicate, prisoned chord
Within his sodden brain.

The brain of him who lived remote
And dreamed strange things he never wrote
But hoarded in his mind.
He would not kill the dreams he loved
For sake of little things that moved
The passions of mankind.

Let the red torches toss and flare,
And all the long-stemmed trumpets blare,
Let brass beat loud on brass.
Let the Kings ride in victory,
Low comes the thought amidst the cry,
"These visions shall but pass."

For, like reflections in a mirror,
Or empty bubbles on a river,
The striving world passed by.
What seemed to others worth the winning
Thro' strong desire or hate of sinning
Brought him no energy.

The thunder muttering on the hills,
The song of birds, the babbling rills,
The painted flowers and stars,
This pageantry of earth did seem
The parcel of a timeless dream.
He lived beyond the bars.

It was to him a vague mirage
Or memory of a storied page
With only that appeal ;
But oftentimes a sound or sight
Would bring to him his own delight
More subtle than the real.

And with his sense of entity
Half lost, he raised a vacant eye
Into the empyrean.
And as he lay upon his back
The peeling centuries rolled back . . .
He saw the blue Ægean.

And thus he dreamt : " My palace home
With minaret and marble dome
Upon the sapphire strait.

My garden full of nightingales,
One singing as the other fails
While evening groweth late.

“ And from my watch-tower I behold
Beneath a sky of molten gold
My argosies return.
A homeward wind is in their sails,
Freighted are they with costly bales,
Vast fires behind them burn.

“ I have a room with shining floors
And lofty roof and polished doors,
Wherein I love to dine
With two good friends at left and right,
Whose converse is my soul's delight
And glads my heart like wine.

“ Or in my marble portico
We sit and watch the summer glow
And talk of love and death ;
And when the amber twilight fails
We listen to the nightingales,
And evening holds her breath.

“ Oh ! Charicles and Charmides,
Much have I dreamt of hours like these,
My friends I never knew—
Whose voices and whose grave, sweet words
Were lovelier than the songs of birds,
And fresher than the dew.

“For Charicles has love and youth,
And all his words are sweet with truth,
Like a garden with the rain ;
And Charmides is mild and wise,
But with his tear-washed, violet eyes
Yet can he smile again.

“Perhaps I knew you, ancient lords
Of nobler wit and finer chords—
But this I cannot tell ;
For ever lovely things I sought
In some strange borderland of thought,
Content therein to dwell.

“For who could blame or who could praise
If one should choose to pass his days
In a phantasy of dreams,
And, finding thus his own ideal
In things dissevered from the real,
Be happier than he seems ?

“Ah ! who could praise or who could blame,
Tho’ glimmers all my way the same,
Like a dyke-road thro’ a fen.
Far on, far on—a ruddy spark—
The toll-light glows adown the dark,
And I, like other men,

“Must pay my toll and pass beyond,—
I made no vow, I signed no bond,
Nor lose my self-esteem,

But pass, unknown, unloved, unlost,
The man who knew and weighed the cost,
The man who dared to dream.

“ For what is Fame and what’s a Name,
Your cries of sorrow, wrath, and shame,
Your Hamlets and King Lears,
The night must cover them again
Did they last a thousand lives of men,
A thousand thousand years.

“ The world may say that I have missed ;
Ah ! no—I am an egoist
Of subtle, fixed design.
My dreams a garden are to me
To which no other holds the key,
I wish to keep them mine.

“ All mine—those tender, half-thought things,
Which flutter gossamer rainbow wings
And hover near, near, near.
Why should I catch and pin them down
And lose their beauty for a crown
Would chafe my brows to wear.

“ And thus, a baser alchemist
In some perverted plan persist
To turn my gold to dross.
If I turned my gold their soul were sold
Tho’ I wore a crown and cloth of gold,
Their soul were then the loss.

“ If I sat high, a crownèd king,
With lofty brows in a royal ring,
A lustrous diadem,
If I wore the titles ‘ High, Strong, and Wise,’
And garments stained with purple dyes,
All jewelled at the hem

“ With emeralds, rubies and jacinth stones,
Such as great kings wear on their golden thrones,
And a royal mantle of vair,
And held a sceptre in my hand,
Which showed me ruler of all the land,
In my palace, where none might dare

“ To cross my word, but all must bow
As the courtly throng are bending now,
And give the King his meed,
And slaves waved forests of peacock fans
And a cry went up like a single man’s,
‘ This is the King indeed.’

“ For I could be King and Overlord
In the wondrous realm of the written word,
Am King there . . . in my dreams.
So, loving dreams, this life I choose—
The tramp’s with tattered coat and shoes,
Yet happier than it seems.

“ Thus, oh ! my dreams, you grow not old,
No process dims you, leaves you cold,
Immortal, bright, you come,

And if you come not, I am wise,
I have my trusted old allies,
Tobacco, beer, and rum."

His chin sank down upon his breast,
And suddenly the brown bird ceased
To pour her strain abroad.
A sound less sweet to mortal ear
Uprose (had one been there to hear) . . .
It was the tramp who snored.

The Black Dwarf.

Certain it is that of those qualities
We are enamoured which we most do lack.
So he, fantastic out of human guise,
Bent, broken, bowed, small, apish, humped of back,
Marred in the mint, perfection's contrary,
To sweet perfection found his marred life thrall,
And—the great artist without jealousy—
Knew beauty more than all.

Much he loved flowers and their frail loveliness,
But if they pined thro' blight or thirsty want,
Or spiteful wind had made his blossoms less,
Or mouse or mole had gnawed some tender plant,
Then seemed the edge of life all dull and blunt,
And passion thwarted tore his twisted frame,
And, 'neath the penthouse of the shaggy front,
The yellow eyes flashed flame.

But most he joyed whenever country maid,
Prizing his taste, or damsel highly born
To judgment came, and anxiously displayed
For him submission as for others scorn.
Then, peering keenly from his peat-roofed home,
Calm in his power he scanned her as he chose,
And, if she pleased, the swart and twisted gnome
Gave her a white, white rose.

To an Elephant.

Lord of the trunk and fan-like ears,
Wisest and mightiest next to man,
I see thee hence a million years
Ruling the earth with milder plan.
Dwellers above, beneath the ground,
Shall live contented in that time ;
No subtle growths shall e'er confound
Their natural joy and instinct prime.

Not such as those who planned to nought
And groped (wise fools !) beyond their ken
Scarce knowing what they loved or sought—
Those subtle growths, those weary men—
Shall dwell earth's inexperienced brood
In natural joy and instinct prime ;
But without evil, without good,
Be each new moment, not all time.

Jungles shall grow where cities stood,
The mighty rivers roar unbridged
The hungry tiger seek his food,
Save for thy bidding, privileged,
Where (weary subtle growths) we bore
Our burden of humanity ;
For conscious mind shall work no more
And man himself have ceased to be.

SONGS.



The Palmer's Song.

I will fling ambition away
Like a vain and glittering toy ;
With tristful weeping will I pray
And wash my sin's alloy.
I will wear the palmer's weed
And walk in the sandal shoon.
I will walk in the sun by day
And sleep beneath the moon.
I will set forth as the bells toll
And travel to the East,
Because of a sin upon my soul
And the chiding of a priest.

The Song of the Old Men.

We are the old, old men,
Once fierce and high-hearted in frolics,
But now we are three score and ten
Or upwards—mere relics
Of the fine strong pageant of youth,
Which time in his spite and unruth
Has taken.
We are dim and palsied and shaken,
Ah ! me—forsaken.

Where are the fair white maids
With flower faces and carriage
Straight as new-smithied blades,
Ripe, ready for marriage ?
Now all are withered and grey,
Their beauty has passed away,
Ah ! madness—
They are bent like hoops with sadness
And the world's badness.

Our voices are hoarse and drear,
As we sit and mumble together,
We have no good tidings to hear
We had sooner have never
(So we grumble together) been born,
That are so sick and forlorn ;
Just shadows—
But once bright fishers of shallows,
Swift hunters of meadows.

We are the old, old men,
We have seen and endured much trouble ;
It has turned us children again,
And bent us double.
Now we sit like a circle of stones,
And hear in each others' moans
Ill token.
For our sweetest thoughts were broken
Or else unspoken.

The Song of Snorro.

“ Oh ! who can drink at the world’s brink,
Or reach the twilight star ?
It’s a long sail where the winds wail,
And the great waters are.

“ Or who can say at the parting day
That he will see once more
His children’s faces in happy places,
His true wife at the door ? ”

Snorro the Viking, his thigh striking,
Laughed in his big red beard.
“ Some are bound by sight and sound,
While some have wished and feared.

“ Their days dream as a droning stream
Or moonlight in a wood.
Now who can sate his love or hate,
And the tumult of his blood ?

“ Then cast the die for the open sky
When the great sun beats abroad,
For the foam-fleck and the narrow deck,
The life of oar and sword.

“ Life and limb for the wind’s hymn,
And all the fears that be,
The ghost-races with ghastly faces,
The phantoms of the sea.

“ Mine is the morrow,” shouted Snorro,
“ I longed and have not feared.”
And his great laughter followed after
And rumbled in his beard.

The Island.

Once (was it long ago, dear?
Oh! hark to the sighing seas.)
We sailed to a wonderful Island
In the golden Antipodes,
Where the waves wore an azure mantle,
The winds were ever at rest,
For we'd left the Old World behind us
A thousand leagues to the West.

We came to that wonderful Island;
Girt by a ring of foam
It lay in the sea like a jewel
Under an azure dome.
The cliffs were all gold in the sunlight,
The strand was a floor of gold,
So we knew we'd come to the Island
We'd read of in tales of old.

Was it long we stayed in our Island?
(Dear, I can never say)
I know we walked on the mountains
Which looked far over the bay.
I know that we laughed for pleasure
(Were we wise or a couple of fools?)
As we gazed at the painted fishes
Which swam in the shallow pools.

And night drew over our Island
The purple pall of the skies,
The air was heavy with fragrance

And soft with the breath of sighs,
And voices out of the forest,
Voices out of the sea,
Told the eternal secret : . .
Told it to you and me.

And the stars came down from the heavens,
And the magical tropic moon,
To dance a measure together
Over the still lagoon ;
And the whisper of distant forests,
The noise of the surf in our ears,
Seemed like the song of the ages
Sung by the passing years.

But we said "farewell" to our Island
Which we had discovered alone . . .
The sand . . . and the palms . . . and the headland . . .
The westering wind . . . and the sun.
We said "farewell" to our Island
(Oh ! hark to the sullen rain !)
. . . And I knew as it fell behind us
We should not see it again.

For only a few may go there
And they but once may go,
With glamour of stars above them
And the swinging seas below.
But I still hear its forests whisper,
The noise of the surf on the shore,
In that far-off wonderful Island
Which I shall see no more.

Fair Filamelle.

Fair Filamelle is my distress
With all her cruel backwardness.
She will not listen to my pain,
But turneth from me in disdain.
That fair Filamelle
Her disdain is now my hell.
She hath bewitched me with her eyes,
As Circe did the sailor wise,
Or Egypt did the Roman Prince,
Two thousand years ago.
I've little else but weeping since,
My heart is like a stone.

If you like laughter's silver sound
Why have you dealt me such a wound,
If youth and beauty look askance
At glum and heavy countenance,
Why is it coy and cruel,
Adding to my fire more fuel?
Alas! Alas! it has no care,
Free as the birds which flit in air,
Nor heedfulness has any,
Else were its kindness not so rare,
Its victims then so many.

Ah! fair Filamelle, have pity on my moan,
Else must I die alone,
My heart is like a stone.

The Song of Kisses.

I have no skill in Love's soft war,
Nor am I bold to woo
In the same sort that conquerors are
When they are lovers too.
Tho' passion thunders in my brain
Like ocean on a beach,
My tongue is bounden with a chain
And manacled my speech.
Yet, could I let one word go free
To touch your chords with fire,
Become the wind upon the sea
The plectrum of the lyre,
Then, my Althea, should we be
Two lovers without shame,
All things in their epitome,
The Universe our name.
Then should we bow to Love's command
As the waves kiss the shore
And the rain falls upon the land
That it may thirst no more.
Then should we kiss, with time at bay
As in the Ajalon valley,
A score—two score—two hundred—nay
We would not keep the tally—
A hundred thousand in one bout,
Ten myriads ere we slumbered,
And the stars winked and all went out
To find themselves out-numbered.

The Song of Odysseus.

Out of the dark I return—
The abode of the shades ;
The words which they said
Were the strengthless words of the Dead,
Meaningless, nothing importing.

Out of the dark I return
And the House of the Dead ;
The endless regions of gloom
Deep sepulchred in the womb
Of Earth, the mother of all things.

Out of the dark I return,
From the stream of the Dead ;
I slew a goat on the brink
And they pressed around me to drink
Their shadowy twittering legions.

Out of the dark I return,
From the speech of the Dead ;
I asked them for counsel and word,
They twittered like bats when they heard
And wailed for the warm blood flowing.

Out of the dark I return ;
(Ye are baffled, Oh ! Dead) ;
Lost hopes, lost hearts, lost loves,
Hollow-eyed, hollow-cheeked are your droves,
I drew my sword and ye vanished.

Out of the dark I return
And the dust of desire ;
My ears are still filled with the shrieks
Of the pitiful Dead and my cheeks
Still pale with the paleness of Hades.

Out of the dark I return
For the day, for the deed ;
And now to Apollo, the slayer,
I stand and utter a prayer
Humbly, first making obeisance.

Out of the dark I return
And the dust of desire ;
My ears are still filled with the shrieks
Of the pitiful Dead and my cheeks
Still pale with the paleness of Hades.

Out of the dark I return
For the day, for the deed ;
And now to Apollo, the slayer,
I stand and utter a prayer
Humbly, first making obeisance.

STORIES IN VERSE.

Adeimantus.

The dream of Adeimantus
Who carved for a Grecian Prince
Statues of perfect marble,
Fairer than all things since,
Wonderful, white, and gracious
Like lotus flowers on a mere,
Or phantoms born of the moonbeam,
Beyond all praise but a tear.

The dream of Adeimantus
(As he lay upon his bed),
Wonderful, white, and gracious,
And this was the word it said.

“Arise ! oh ! Adeimantus,
The breath of the dawn blows chill,
The stars begin to fade
Ere the first ray strikes the sill.

Arise ! oh ! Adeimantus
For here is work to your hand,
If the fingers fashion the dream
As the soul can understand.”

He rose from his troubled bed
Ere the dream had faded away,
And he said, “I will fashion the dream
As the potter fashions the clay.”

He said in his great heart's vanity,
“I will fashion a wondrous thing,
To stand in a palace of onyx
And blind the eyes of a king.”

He said in the pride of his soul
As the birds began to sing,

“I will surely take no rest
Till I fashion this wondrous thing.
I will swear an oath to eschew
The white wine and the red,
To eat no delicate meats
Nor break the fair, white bread.
I will not walk in the city
But labour here alone
In the dew and the dusk and the flush
Till the vision smiles from the stone.”
Six days he wrought at the marble,
But cunning had left his hand,
And his fingers would not fashion
What his soul could understand.
Six days he fasted and travailed,
Hard was the watch to keep,
So the chisel fell from his fingers
And he sank with a sob to sleep.
But a vision came to his slumber
Beautiful as before,
Floating in with the moonbeam
Gliding over the floor.
It floated in with the moonbeam
And stood beside his bed,
Wonderful, white, and gracious,
And this was the word it said.
“Courage, oh ! Adeimantus,
I am the perfect thing
To stand in a shrine of jasper
And blind the eyes of a king.
I am the strange desire,
The glory beyond the dream,

The passion above the song,
The spirit-light of the gleam.
I come to my best beloved,
Not actual, from afar,
Fairer than hope or thought,
More beautiful than a star.
Courage, oh ! Adeimantus,
Lay strength and strength to your soul.
You shall fashion surely a part
Tho' you may not grasp the whole."

Pygmalion.

Once . . . I seem to remember . . .
Crept in the noonday heat
A boy with a crooked shadow
Which capered along the street.
A boy whose shadow was mocked at
By the children passing along,
Straight and tall and beautiful,
Happy with laughter and song.
So, he envied their beauty . . .
He who was crooked and brown . . .
The strong youths of the mountain,
The white girls of the town,
Envied their happy meetings
And the tender words they spoke
In the shadow of the temples,
Under the groves of oak.
And his lonely heart was stricken
That never his lot might be
To walk with a maid who loved him . . .
So quaint and crooked was he.

II

Thus was my heart once stricken
And I repined for a while,
I but a boy in years,
Who longed for a maiden's smile.
Till once on a day in summer
My soul was touched with a gleam,

And I woke from my morbid fancies
Like one from an evil dream,
And knew that the gods in their wisdom
Had made and set me apart.
Lean, misshapen, and ugly . . .
No toy for a maiden's heart.
And I felt with a heart awakened
That leapt in a riot of joy,
The heart of a wise man and proud
Not the heart of a moody boy.
Viewing the old things anew
With an inner wonder in each :
The cloud ships driven thro' heaven,
The sea rolling into the beach,
The magic heart of the woodland,
The loves of nymph and faun,
The splendour of starlight nights,
The calm inviolate dawn.

III

Thus was my spirit quickened,
And once on a lucky day
I drew a bird on plaster,
And modelled a horse in clay ;
Kneeling under a wall
Where a shadow fell on the street,
Eyes and mind intent
In the midst of the noonday heat.
Eyes and mind intent . . .
And a stranger passed my way,
. . . The shadow grew and lengthened

As he stopped to watch my play.
He looked at the little horse,
He looked at the winging bird ;
And ere I noticed his presence
He touched me and spoke a word :
“ Hast thou the mind and will
As thou hast hand and sight . . . ?
Follow me if thou hast
And climb . . . oh ! climb to the height.”

IV

So I followed him to his workshop
And stayed there a year and a year
Working under a master
Who praised me and held me dear,
Till at last a day arose
When, taking my hand in his own,
“ You have my knowledge,” he said,
“ And now you must stand alone.”
And tho’ I sorrowed to leave him
My heart was ready to sing,
So first in praise of the gods
I made for an offering
(Even as does a shepherd
His rustic altar of sods)
Bright forms larger than human
As mortals dream of the gods.
Then, in my strange world-worship,
The Tritons, Lords of the Sea,
The creatures which haunt the woodland,
Happy and shy and free,

Nymphs and satyrs and fauns
Who worship the great god Pan,
And lastly the mighty heroes
Who fashion the mind of man.

V

Thus thought I and thus wrought I,
And my power grew greater still.
I rose to the heights of passion
And sounded the depths of will,
Reaching out to the farthest
Winnowing down to the last,
Gazing into the future
And diving into the past.
Higher and ever higher
Like an eagle soared my art
And I praised the most high gods
Who made and set me apart.
And Prince and poet and painter
Travelled to touch my hand,
The minds which had toiled and suffered,
The minds which could understand,
Marvelling in my workshop
At the shining forms they saw . . .
The children of my spirit
Born of a higher law.

VI

But last on a day in summer
(An evil day it seems)

I thought, "I will fashion a woman
As I have seen in dreams.
I, who never loved woman
That breathed and spoke and moved,
Will fashion a noble statue
To show what I could have loved ;
A glorious naked figure
Untouched by time or fate,
A symbol of all that might be
And she shall be my mate.
Not mate of my crooked body,
Lean, misshapen and brown,
(No longer I feared my shadow
But walked a prince in the town)
But mate for my glorious spirit
Winging thro' shimmering heights,
On the viewless pinions of fancy
Where none can follow its flights."
Thus was I moved in spirit
And wrought, a happy slave,
Striving to make the best
Of the gifts the high gods gave,
Fashioning out of the marble,
—And I knew my work was good—
The arms and the breasts and the thighs
And the glory of womanhood.

VII

Lo ! the statue is finished.
Look how it stands serene
A woman with tender smile

And proud eyes of a queen !
Lo ! the statue is perfect. . . .
Flower and crown of my life. . . .
I who never loved woman
Could take this woman for wife. . . .
Her, my Galatea,
My wonderful milk-white friend,
Work of my hand and brain
Linked to this noble end.

VIII

The statue stands above me,
Flower and crown of my art . . .
But would that the gods had made me
As others, not set me apart.
For what, in the measure of life,
Is work on a lower plane ?
And this the finest, brightest—
Further I cannot attain.
Shall I grind its beauty to fragments
Or shatter its symmetry ?—
For I have made it in secret
And none has seen it but me.
My hand would falter and fail—
Oh ! . . . I could not forget.
I still should see it in dreams
With a passion of regret.
Or . . . Shall I wait till morning
White-winged over the land,
Ere the fishermen tramp the beach
And drag their boats to the sand ;

And find at last . . . oh ! at last
A boon denied to me,
Rest in the ever-restless,
The huge, unquiet sea,
That the brain may be freed from toil
Which has toiled to a luckless end
When it touched its highest powers
And shaped my milk-white friend.

IX

For a dream is only a dream,
(My best and my last stands there)
And a stone is only a stone,
Be it carven beyond compare,
And the veriest hind of the field
Who sweats for his hungry brood,
Has a deeper knowledge than I
Of our mortal evil and good.
Oh ! gods, if ever I sought you,
And found you, terrible lords,
Zeus in the rattling thunder,
Ares in din of swords ;
And thou, wise grey-eyed lady,
Who lovest the sober mean,
Reason and grave discourses,
A tempered mind and serene,
You have I duly honoured—
Yet one have I kept apart,
(Lean, misshapen, and ugly
No toy for a maiden's heart).
Oh ! foam-begotten and smiling,

Oh, perilous child of the sea—
Forgive—ere too late—and befriend me !
What am I—what is life without thee ? ”
And his prayer went up like a vapour
To the palace above the snows,
Where the shining gods held revel,
And deathless laughter arose.
But Hupnos swiftly descended
Like a noiseless bird of the night
And brushed his eyes with pinions
Downy and thick and light,
Circled dimly about him,
And brushed his eyes as he prayed
Laying a drowsy mandate,
And the watcher drooped and obeyed.

X

In at the workshop windows
Peacefully stole the dawn ;
Tinting the marble figures
Of wood-nymph, goddess and faun,
Broadening in a streamer
Which touched with a rosy glow
The still white form of the statue,
The sleeper kneeling below.
. . . She moved as the red light touched her
And life stirred under her hair,
A little shiver ran over
Her glorious limbs all bare.
Thro' arms and breasts and thighs
The warm blood pulsed and ran :

And she stepped down from the pedestal—
A woman unto a man ;
Saying in tender accents
Of low and musical tone :
“ Oh ! sleeper, wake from thy slumber
No longer art thou alone. . . .”

Alexis.

Who slew Alexis? Some one smote
Right thro' the white and tender throat
(And scarce gave time for fear)
The jewelled doll, who sprang from kings,
With farded cheek and flashing rings,
And left him lying here.

He sat upon a throne, pardye,
The ancient throne of Muscovy,
Smiling a harlot's smile,
And gave—the painted popinjay—
The word which no man might gainsay,
Tossing his curls the while.

And savage warriors, steel on hips,
Muttered between their bearded lips,
And spat upon the floor,
To see a thing so debonnaire
Enthroned upon a conqueror's chair,
And find their King half-whore.

Or in a gallery all aflare,
Approached by some dark palace stair,
He lay in languid mood,
And naked women, mad with wine,
Did cruelty and lust combine
To stir his tainted blood.

So plunged, half woman and half devil,
In many a foul and roaring revel,

By some fierce craving fanned,
Alexis, with the girlish face
And swaying movements full of grace,
The Ruler of this Land.

So, hunted by a mind diseased,
By those fierce orgies unappeased,
He thirsted after new ;
And monstrous things he did (they say)
Which never saw the light of day,
Shared by a chosen few.

The rocks were cleft to bring him treasure,
The mothers mourned to give him pleasure,
The whole land writhed in pain.
All night the secret chambers flared,
All night the horrid deeds were dared
Which made him thirst again.

And pampered Turks lived by his side,
With gobbling negroes bloodshot-eyed,
And hags with mouths impure.
And day and night the warders tall
Stood watching on his castle wall
That he might dwell secure.

Strange visions did upon him throng
With shapes confused which held him long,
A riot in his brain.
Unbridled lust, unbounded power
So worked upon him in that hour . . .
I think he was insane.

And I—who had no God to please,
And nursed him crowing on my knees—
I waited by the stair,
And as he gave a joyous note,
Passed this bright iron thro' his throat
And left him lying there.

The King's Cloak.

There was a King in Norroway
Who loved a famous sport,
He followed it in the sun and snow
With the nobles of his Court.
In all his kingdom mountainous
Was none so swift as he
(For so they said who ate his bread)
At running on the ski.

His black heart swelled with pride
As the acorn swells with the tree,
And from all his kingdom mountainous
He called the men of the ski.
From fir-pricked crag and gloomy gorge
Where the lonely log-huts cling,
And till the King's word bade them cease
They raced before the King.

So raced they down a spear-broad track,
Where never tree did grow,
Between the mountains and the sea
A thousand feet below
Till sundip in a cold pearl sky
And a west of ageless pink
From a withered pine to the King enthroned
With his nobles by the brink.

There ran one with the racers
Straight-fashioned as a sword,
With sail-brown cheek and eyes as deep
As water in a fiord

And till the King's word bade them cease
None passed or touched him near,
He leapt as frightened chamois leap
And ran like a stricken deer.

Dusk threw a hateful shadow
On the King's countenance
"The guerdons of thy skill," cried he,
"Or, boy, thy luck, perchance?
This figured ivory drinking horn!
This turquoise-hilted sword!
But . . . shall I see no marvel
Ere day dips in the fiord?"

There is not in fair Norrøway
My master on the ski
One bolder or more skilful . . .
A marvel wouldst thou see?"
—Bold and high was the answer—
" 'Twas skill not luck, Oh! King,
I am the swiftest. . . A marvel
Of whom the scalds shall sing."

"Oh! yonder stand the mountains
And yonder moans the sea
And he who leapt from the topmost crag . . .
A bold man would he be.
A bold man . . . yea, a marvel
For the grey-haired scalds to hymn . . ."
Day dying touched his swarthy cheek
With a lurid light and grim,

While he made the gloomy challenge
And round a murmur ran,
But . . . the boy bowed low and answered,
"Oh! King, behold the man
The swiftest and the boldest
In thy kingdom by the sea,
From mountain or . . . from hatred
What man can do, dares he."

. . . He swept down from the mountain
Like an eaglet on a hare
With bent back and swinging arms
And tossing golden hair . . .
The King stood by the precipice
(A small sea moaned and broke)
. . . Looked down over the wrinkled sea
And swiftly loosed his cloak.

. . . He came as an arrow is loosened . . .
As a slinger slings a stone,
Clutched (as the sun shot downwards)
At one on the brink alone . . .
The King leapt back . . . the King laughed out . . .
The great cloak floated free . . .
There came no sound—tho' he listened long—
From the darkened moaning sea.

The Knight and the Witch.

A voice cried over the Hills
“Follow the strange desire.
Oh! follow, follow, follow,
The world is on fire.
Day burns on funeral bed
In flame of sky and sea,
And, black against that red,
Is the tower where dwelleth she
And gazeth, white foot pressed
On bruised heaps of bloom,
O’er the sea which cannot rest
And sounds thro’ her room.
Murmurs in her room
Thro’ a casement open wide
The sea which is a tomb
For mariners of pride.
Oh! follow, follow, follow,
Come quickly unto her,
Her body is more sweet
Than cassia or myrrh,
She is whiter than the moon,
She is stranger than death,
Stronger than the new moon
Which the waters draweth.
More lovely are her words
More lovely is she
Than the flight of white birds
O’er a halcyon sea.
She took the stars for toys—
Her magic was so strong—

Murmurs of earth and the noise
Of green seas for a song.
She leant down on the sill
And called across the sea.
“ . . . Oh ! follow, follow, follow,
Come quickly unto me. . . . ”
A voice cried over the Hills
“ Oh ! come, I fail, I swoon,
Pale with my love’s excess,
Paler than our pale moon.
Oh ! come, Oh ! come, Oh ! come,
Before the days eclipse
We’ll meet with brimming eyes
And kiss with quivering lips.
Love-drunken, breast to breast,
With half-closed eyes we’ll kiss,
And reel from bliss to pain
From pain again to bliss.
The sea which cannot rest
From its undernote of doom
(We swooning breast on breast)
Shall murmur thro’ my room.
Shall murmur all night long
Thro’ a casement open wide.
The sea, which is a tomb
For mariners of pride,
With an undernote of doom
Shall murmur evermore
That love is in the room
And Death is at the door,
That Death will bruise to dust
Our flower-drenched passion soon

Darker than darkest night
Colder than our cold moon.
So shall it ebb and flow
Our love like those sea-tides
For a space . . . a little space—
What matter? . . . nought abides.”

A voice cried over the Hills,
“What matter? . . . all things die,
Our quivering love’s excess,
Our rose-drenched ecstasy
As glimmering waters drawn
By the magic of the moon,
As the moon itself at dawn
Our love shall vanish soon.
So swift (my love-pale groom)
A white bird wings its flight.
Then find you Death’s cold room,
Darker than darkest night ;
Then find you that dark door
(And find it all men must)
And love there nevermore
But crumble back to dust,
And kiss there nevermore
In flower-drenched ecstasy ;
Too late then to implore,
Too cold to hear a cry.”

And then towards the shelving beach
A cedar shallop drew,
With silver prow shaped like a swan
And sails of rainbow hue.

Swiftly it came with a wake of foam
And lying on its side
Like an arrow's flight towards the Knight,
Tho' none sat there to guide.
And in the shallows by the shore
It came to rest at last,
The cordage slacked and the rainbow sail
Flapped idly on the mast.
And the Swan-prow with the ruby eyes
Opened his silver beak,
And with a musical, magic voice
He thus began to speak.
"Step in, step in, my gallant lad,
Your youth shall be my fare.
For you my mistress opes her door
And combs her wine-dark hair.
She swelled my sail with an eager wind
And drove me to this beach,
She gave strange sight to my ruby eyes
And filled my beak with speech.

"She saw you in the magic glass
The hour that she has might,
As you rode across the purple heath,
Honour and armour bright.
Step in, step in, my lover bold
And come to the West with me
Where the young nymphs play in the wave and lift
Their white arms from the sea ;
And the Tritons chase the laughing rout
And swim by the vessel's side,
Blowing on horns confusedly,

Or shouting words of pride.
You hear it now, but the time will come
When you shall hear no more
The ceaseless wash of a dreaming sea,
Its ripples on the shore.
Oh ! follow, follow the sinking sun
And the great white Evening Star,
A magic wind shall breathe behind
Our sail, and bear us far."

He doffed his red-plumed casque of steel,
All flaxen was his hair,
And he was clad from throat to heel
In the armour princes wear,
From throat to heel in silver mail
Like a shining prince in a fairy-tale.

The witch Hegertha o'er him bent,
(Ah ! God, her face was fair)
Her breath blew on him like a scent,
She touched him with her hair.
There was no stronger witch than this,
And she gave the Knight her first kiss.
And he was bound to her sword and hand,
To do whatever she might command.

Then up to her full height she drew,
Down poured her hair like wine,
Her pale, proud face looked sadly through
—A moon in a wood of pine—
She breathed a spell in a low, sweet tone

Which none of woman born could disown.
And he was bound to her side till death
By the spell just uttered above her breath.

She drew his soul forth with her eyes,
As a drinker slakes his drouth,
A little smile played sorrowful, wise,
About her rose-red mouth.
She stooped down and called his soul forth,
And left him naught but his body's earth.
And he was bound to her evermore
By the soul he lost and the word he swore.

For evermore and evermore
In the chamber by the sea,
Till death should break the spell-bound door
And end his slavery;
In the chamber strewn with flowers in bloom
With a heavy scent like death,
Echoing ever the song of doom
Which the sad sea moaned beneath.
For evermore and evermore
Till life ceased in his side,
Bound to the room and the rose-strewn floor
And the strange, unholy bride.

And naught could save him now, when once the spell
Had fallen on him, binding limbs and will,
Where he sat listening to the sad sea swell,
Amid the roses which no time could kill.
Naught could restore lost courage to his eyes,
The Knightly ardour that he used to feel,

Or make his heart the seat of high emprise,
Or nerve his hand to grasp the shining steel.
Whether she kept him fast by her enchantment,
Or drove him forth to roam death-pale and weeping,
Naught could remind him what his life's fair grant
 meant,
Now that his soul was in Hegertha's keeping.

The Dreamer.

This is the dream of the Dreamer
With the grave thought-sunken eyes,
Which he dreamed between sleeping and waking,
Between the night and the making
Of dawn . . . and he dreamed in this wise :

To the gate of the dawn came a chariot
Which four black stallions were drawing,
And a spirit charioteer,
With the burning eyes of a seer,
Held them impatiently pawing.

He mounted the floor of the chariot,
And the Spirit drew together
His reins, his strong grip tight'ning,
And his thong flashed out like a lightning,
And the horses rushed up to æther.

The Dreamer was caught into space
With a pang as of ending or birth,
And lo ! clouds builded above him,
And beneath him soundless and moving
The sea of his own little earth.

They clove the walls of the clouds,
And snorted each coal black stallion
Nursed by the Spirit, whose hair
Streamed out like a banner, and bare
In the night was the moon—a medallion

And then an ice-sheathed corpse
With ancient glaciers and snouted
Craters of fires extinct,
Chain on chain of them linked.
And the Lord of the Chariot shouted

And shook out his hissing lash
Over the backs of the four
Till they whirled up faster and faster,
Till the sun became vaster and vaster,
And its flames leapt out with a roar

Of mountains, subsident, resurging,
Innumerable, ceaseless of action,
Years and years into space . . .
And the Dreamer covered his face,
As he rode, in his stupefaction.

They passed with a dip and a swerve,
As a swallow skims the downs,
Far up into the height,
And the stars looked down from the night
Like the lights of distant towns.

Swift is the lonely thought
Of a sage, a mountain-dweller,
But swifter far was their rush
Thro' the awful cold and the hush
Of the spaces interstellar.

They heard the approaching thunder,
And saw the glare of a comet

Holding its destined way
To an undiscovered day,
And its tresses streamed out from it.

They broke thro' other systems,
By huger alien spheres,
Each in its orbit travelling,
The timeless skeins unravelling
Of a law with no count of years

And came at last to a planet,
Girt in a gleaming ring
Of cloud and vapour and mist,
Which the light of four moons kissed
To a wonderful milk-white thing.

Then the Spirit reined in his stallions,
And pointed in exultation
And turned his orbèd eyes,
Which burned with a wild surmise
And a dreadful penetration,

On the Dreamer, who followed, and lo !
The Heavens had changed their stations,
And their voids were with unknown
And greater galaxies sown
And altered constellations.

And, beyond, a scatter of crystals,
And, beyond, bright motes in a beam,
And, beyond, while the Spirit probed him
To the soul in the flesh that robed him,
An uncountable shimmering stream.

He saw these worlds all marshalled,
And their ways all governed for ever ;
And he felt the sight of his soul
Shrivel up like a fire-licked scroll
In his insupportable terror.

Then the Spirit pointed again,
And wheeled the might of his horses
And shouted . . . and down they fell,
As a pebble drops in a well,
Thro' the worlds and the roar of their courses.

And the Dreamer looked, and behold !
In a point to æons withdrawn. . . .
A scarce visible speck of light,
His own sun like a mite,
And the blur of his own little dawn.

II

Now the Dreamer, who rode by night
In the car of the Spirit thro' space,
Came in the blue of June morning,
In a mood betwixt pity and scorning,
To the populous market-place.

Afar in the infinite blue
Hung the snow-capped mountain-ranges ;
But round him moved the press
Of the city's business
In kaleidoscopic changes.

For the square was all life and all colour,
All confusion and clamour,
As dealers showed the paces
Of colts, untamed in the traces,
To the rap of the auctioneer's hammer.

He saw there the dusty sheep
Trotting blindly amidst the throng ;
The swine with quivering snouts,
The boys who urged them with shouts,
The hawkers of picture and song ;

The brown-skinned peasants trudging
By their slow-paced bullock wains,
With children asprawl the load,
And wives who scolded and rode
With an eye to their husbands' gains ;

The hooknosed Orient merchants,
Who came in the caravans
And bargained over the prices
Of silks and carpets and spices,
Pearls and feathers and fans ;

The clumsy sailors in ear-rings
From the echoing harbour beach,
With parrots and shells for their wares,
The light of the sun in their stares,
The sound of the wind in their speech.

And the shrill-voiced changers of money
Who sat with their clerks at the tables. . . .

And it seemed to him all no matter
As he gazed . . . like the evening chatter
Of starlings under his gables.

III

And lo! hard by at a pillar
Two learned Sophists disputed,
Taking the turn of speech
And disciples applauded each
Or else each other confuted

With babble and clenching of fist,
And thrusting of face into face,
And saying "Demus hath reason"
Or "Lycas hath conquered. The season
Of Demus hath passed, and his place

"Is with us no longer." And mildly
The grave-eyed Dreamer watched them
Shouting and seething and ranting.
But, when they perceived him, panting
(For a sudden impulse snatched them)

Ran up a crowd of both factions
And cried, "Oh! Master, befriend us,
For we all of us know thou art wisest,
That thou speakest the truth and despisest
No man and his need. Therefore lend us

"Thy wisdom in this our dilemma."
And the Dreamer answered, "I hear."

So they told him with quibble and chatter . . .
And it seemed to him all no matter
Like the croaking of frogs in a mere.

IV

And behold ! there ran thro' the market,
Hard by where the Dreamer stood,
A natural, void of desire
Save for warmth of the sun or of fire
Or for softness abed or food.

Naught held he dearer in mind,
Save the branchèd lightning veins ;
And in naught more strongly rejoiced
Save the sound of the thunder deep-voiced
Or the fertile flash of the rains

Or the seas climbing into the harbour ;
And so thro' the market he ran
Happy and careless and free
(Him no man heeded for he
Was a boy who would ne'er be a man)

Munching the gift of a cake,
A pilfered apple or fig,
Or danced with his shadow awhile,
Smiling a secret smile,
Or twirled a hued whirligig.

And the Dreamer called to him, "Come !"
As he skipped in the sun with his Shadow.

And the boy came doubtful and shy
With a timid foot and eye,
As a young horse comes in a meadow.

And the Dreamer touched his cheek
And murmured, "Be not afraid,"
And the boy took heart and smiled,
For the voice was tender and mild,
And then half sadly it said,

"Oh! ye who have called me the Master,
The Teller of Truth, and the Wise,
Oh! ye who have strayed in the dark
Give ear to my saying and mark,
For I give you a pearl of price,

"A dark saying, and a hard saying
To those who read it aright—
This natural, whom ye see,
Is wiser, Oh! blind ones, than ye,
And thus have I learned in the night."

DIALOGUES.



The Parting of Lancelot and Guinevere.

(Mallory paraphrased.)

“Be as be may,” said Lancelot,
“I go upon my quest.”
So mounted he and rode alone
Eight days into the West.
And to a nunnery came at last
Hard by a forest ride,
And walking in the cloister-shades
Was by the Queen espied.
And, when she saw him, swooned she thrice
And said, when speak she might,
“Ye marvel why I make this fare ?
’Tis truly for the sight
Of yonder knight that standeth there,
And so must ever be ;
Wherefore I pray you swiftly go
And call him unto me.”
And to them all said Guinevere
When Lancelot was brought
“Fair ladies, thro’ this man and me
Hath all this war been wrought,
And death of the most noblest knights
Of whom we have record.
And thro’ the love we loved is slain
My own most noble lord.
Wherefor, Sir Lancelot, wit thou well,
As thou dost wish my weal,
That I am set in such a plight

To get my dear soul heal.
For sinners were the Saints in Heaven
And trust I in God's grace
To sit that day at Christ's right hand
And see His Blessèd Face.
Therefore I heartily require
And do beseech thee sore
For all the love betwixt us was
To see my face no more.
But bid thee now, on God's behalf,
That thou my side forsake,
And to thy kingdom turn again,
And keep thy realm from wrake.
My heart, as well it loved thee once,
Serveth me not arights
To see thee, sithen is destroyed
The flower of kings and knights.
Therefore now get thee to thy realm
And take to thee a wife
And live with her in joy and bliss,
And pray God mend my life."
"Nay, Madam," said Sir Lancelot,
"That shall I never do,
For I should never be so false
Of that I promised you.
But unto the same destiny
As you I will me take,
And cast me specially to pray
For you, for Jesu's sake.
In you I take record of God,
Mine earthly joy I found,
And had you willed had taken you

To dwell on mine own ground.
But sithen you are thus disposed
And will the world forsake,
Be now ensured that I likewise
To penance will me take,
And so, if haply I may find
A hermit white or grey
Who shall receive and shrive me clean,
While lasteth life will pray.
Wherefore I pray you kiss me now,
And never then no mo.”
“Nay,” said the Queen, “Oh! get thee gone,
That can I never do.”
So parted they with wondrous dole
And swooned for their great teen
And to her chamber scarce on live
Her ladies bare the Queen.
But Lancelot woke at last and went
And took his horse from keeping,
And all that day and all that night
Rode thro’ a forest weeping.

The Hermit and the Faun.

A hermit knelt before his door
Long-bearded, bald of head,
When a laughing faun peeped thro' the brake
And these the words he said,
“ My mother was a water-nymph
And in these woods I grew,
The faun, Amyntas, is my name,
To what name answer you ?
How came you to this lonely hut,
Why kneel you in the dust,
With scalp as bald as a beggar's bowl
And beard as red as rust ?
Why make you with those knotted claws
Your gestures strange and sad ?
The sheep-bells tinkle from the plain,
The forest paths are glad.”

“ Oh ! creature of the wood and wild
You may not know my name,
It was forgotten long ago
For it was one of shame.
Therefore I made a vow to dwell
Upon this forest brink
And take the ripened nuts for food
And catch the rain for drink,
To scrape wild honey from the rocks
And make my bed on leaves
Because of the hot sins of my youth
Whereat my spirit grieves.”

“Not such as you, Oh! ancient man,
Our joyous Satyrs here:
Old men are they all laughter-mad
Who wallow in good cheer.
Amid lush grasses soft and cool
They make their feasting ground,
With smilax and with bryony
Their rosy pates are crowned.
You see them thro’ the forest trunks
Great rolling gladsome shapes,
Who prop themselves on skins of wine
By purple piles of grapes.
Their huge brown bellies quake with mirth,
Their ancient eyes are bright,
And there they sit and roar old tales
Far, far into the night.
Then tipsy with the heady juice
Each falls into a heap,
Till white-horned morning bids him wake
With all the land from sleep.”

“Oft lying in this lonely hut
On panting summer nights
I watched the stars like silver lamps
Hung from those purple heights,
And heard the forest-depths behind
Fill with disquieting noise
Like frightened cries of flying girls
And shouts of eager boys,
And saw white shapes go flitting past
Like runners in a race

And caught faint murmurs, sighs and laughs
From all the forest place.
And oft a distant sound of shouts
Came with the soft night airs,
And I . . . lest evil might befall
Got swiftly to my prayers."

"And tell me now, Oh ! ancient man,
The God to whom you pray,
These woods know none but mighty Pan
Whom all our folk obey.
His altar stands by yonder plane
And there the shepherds bring,
Toiling up from the fields below,
Each day an offering,
A lamb or else a yearling kid,
A bud-horned lusty fellow,
Great cheeses, grapes, or bursting figs,
Or apples red and yellow,
Or melons ripened in the sun
A foot from end to end.
Such gifts the shepherds bring to Pan
That he may be their friend.

"He is our Father, Lord of all,
From the meadow to the Pass,
So . . . pray you to a painted bird,
Or green snake in the grass ?"

"Rash Thing, beware," the Hermit cried,
Like agates were his eyes,
"The God I serve you do not know

A strong God, just and wise.
For He will purge your streams and woods,
And smite both hip and thigh
Your Satyrs, amorous bestial sots,
Your careless company
Who wanton in the thymy ways
In which these woods abound,
And kiss with soft empurpled mouths,
Luxuriantly crowned.
My soul is filled with prophecy ;
Dimly I see a bark
Which runs by some low wooded isle ;
The night is warm and dark,
And from a promontory rings
A sudden bitter cry,
It smites the lonely helmsman's ears
And tingles in the sky.
' Oh ! Traveller, tell in every land
These tidings strange and dread,
Let all the peoples wail and weep,
For Pan, great Pan, is dead.' "

Amyntas pursed his pouting lips
And shook his curly head,
" Farewell, old man, the forest calls ;
I like you not," he said.
" Your flesh is dried, your ribs are lean,
You are too lank and sere,
Your voice is harsh, your words are grim
And do not please mine ear.
The great god Pan is all I need
And all I wish to know,

My Father Pan, the shepherd's god,
And now, old man, I go."

Behind him closed a greening brake,
And, after many a hail,
He joined his gay companions
And gambolled in a vale.

Love's Defiance.

"Light of my life lie close
Oh ! Love, I have found you at last ;
Let me hear your low sweet voice
The knell of the aching past.
The lashes lie on your cheek
Oh ! lift them and show me your eyes ;
Twin stars in a mortal face,
They are soft, they are kind, they are wise."

"Heart of my hungry heart
My hero whose hand is in mine
If we fall let it be to the pit,
For to-day we have touched the divine.
Time has stood still to-day . . .
This day which has squandered its sun.
It has been all glory and gold
All perfect days in this one."

"Light of my life, my love,
My lady of dreams, lie near,
The evening sighs thro' the pines,
Hark ! do you feel no fear ?
The light of love flashes out . . .
Oh ! wonder so old and so new—
I am strong with the strength of that name,
Dear, when I look at you."

"Heart of my beating heart,
My friend whose forehead I kiss
In the days which were not days,

Weaker was I than this.
In the years which the locust ate
My spirit clove to the dust,
But now—come fate—I am bold,
I build on a higher trust.”

“Light of my life, my Queen,
Let us quarrel no more with life—
The tears—or the final truth—
We are victors now in the strife.
With its purer days of joy
With its prison anguish too,
All myself, and the past of myself,
My darling, worship you.”

“Heart of my singing heart,
My lover, my lord, all hail!
Fear shall be underfoot,
I feel that we shall not fail.
In the shadowy land we leave
The grim wolves raven and bark,
But our hearts are steadfast at length
And our faces turn from the dark.”

The Playmates.

“Oh ! Mary, Mary, my Mary, oh !
You looked so bonny then.
Will you no give me your little hand,
The sweetest hand I ken ?”

“Oh ! I will give you my little hand,
I’m sweir to say you no,
Oh ! I’ll now give you my hands both
My friendship for to show.”

“Oh ! Mary, Mary, my lassie dear,
The tears stand in these eyne.
Will you no give me a kind word
For the sake of old lang syne ?”

“Oh ! I will give you a kind word
Tho’ I have little skill,
For the time that we were children
And played upon the hill.”

“Oh ! Mary, Mary, my lass o’ gold,
Will you no give me a kiss ?
My heart, I think, is like to break
If you refuse me this.”

“Alas ! and if I must refuse
You will not think me bad.
That your heart should break for my sake,
In truth it makes me sad.”

“Oh ! Mary, Mary, my lassie oh !
I will be true as steel.
Will you no give me your promised word
For the love that I do feel ?”

“Indeed—indeed—I like you well
Aye, better than my brother,
But I canna give you my promised word
For—I must wait for another.”

DRAMAS.

June and November.

On a day, long ago, I was just a child,
I walked with my lover, my arm in his arm,
Half of me was sad and half with joy was wild,
The wind was so soft and the sun was so warm.
I walked with my lover to his pretty nonsense listening,
And I pressed my beating heart against my lover's side;
And tho' my voice was steady my traitor eyes were
glistening,

I showed to my lover all I wished to hide.
His vows were so tender, his speech was so fluent,
He whispered his sorrow if ever we must part.
My heart in my bosom fluttered and played truant,
So I gave it him all . . . my innocent heart.
On a green bank amidst the purple irises,
And the shadow of a pine-wood across it was flung,
I gave him soft words, I gave him my kisses,
I gave him myself—myself that was so young.
On a day, long ago, (pity to remember
How the wind was soft, how the sun was warm,)—
Then it was June and now it is November,
Then I knew no evil nor thought of any harm.

A Foolish Tragedy.

In the capital of Valladolid
There lived a highborn maiden
In a white house in a steep street
With green doors and shutters,
Her lips were like scarlet poppies
And her hair like a black waterfall,
And behind her ear she wore
A flower of red geranium.

And her Spanish lover sighed
And in his love he cried,
“Heaven were nearer
If she were dearer,
She is the most wonderful and beautiful thing
In the capital of Valladolid.

“If I could persuade her father,
That fierce and rich old Councillor,
Not to despise my suit
But let me speak to his daughter,
I would esteem it more
Than the rank of a Grandee of Spain,
A cargo of spices from Java
Or a galleon laden with silver.”

Under a brazen crucifix
And the outstretched arms of our Saviour
(And over her ivory shoulder
Her black hair poured like a waterfall)

To Mary, Mother of Heaven,
Prayed the foolish maiden,
“Mary, send me a lover,
Young and tender and handsome.”

It chanced on a day of festival
In the capital of Valladolid
That their eyes met at a crossing
And their two souls rushed together.
By the greed of a bought duenna
And the interchange of love-notes
And the help of a hempen ladder
They arranged a meeting at midnight.

Her father, the rich old Councillor,
Looked out of a second-floor window
And passed his sword thro' the body
Of one who climbed up a ladder.
His fingers loosed the rungs
And down he crashed to the pavement.
And out of his handsome body
His startled spirit departed.

And the Spanish maiden cried
And moaned until she died,
“My lover dead,
My honour sped.”
So ended a foolish tragedy
In the capital of Valladolid.

Alone !

I

Alone and built of a pallid stone
Across the levels looked her house
And tattered plot, where nought had grown
But withered trees which creaked their boughs.
No fruit or blossom or petal blown
Was there to gladden mournful eyes,
But all was drab and monotone
Beneath a reign of leaden skies.
A red, red weed was all the flower,
Which crawled serpiginous about
The marsh, unchanged from hour to hour
Until the evening blotted out
The landscape which she called her own.

And, save for a ridge of bent and sand,
Which rose between them and the sea,
The marshes stretched on either hand,
And, ever looking, wearied she
Of low sad purple and sombre brown
And, where the rivulets trickled down,
Moss-tracks of vivid green,
And stiff grey grasses which bend and sigh,
As the marsh wind wails and passes by,
And quagmires in between
The firmer ground—and over all
She heard the curlews' dreary call
As they piped eternally.

II

In the days of grace, in the good days gone,
She had set him up on a golden throne,
The face of a god and a heart of stone,
But now she must live alone,
Alone, alone, alone
In a little grey house of stone
Which stares o'er the marshes towards the sea
Where the great grey waves roll sullenly
Night and day for ever and aye
With mournful voices which seem to say
"Alone, alone, alone."

III

She laid her down on a sandy ledge,
Alone,
And buried her face amid the sedge
And mourned till eve for a broken pledge,
Alone,
And the great grey sea began to moan
Gathering noise from depths unknown
And boomed with a hollow undertone
"Alone, alone, alone."

IV

Up came the night with funeral wing
The ominous depths o'ershadowing,
But she lay a dumb insentient thing—
Alone with a heart of stone,
With neither tears nor hopes nor fears
And the booming swell like a monstrous knell
Tolled strongly in her ears.

V

Alone, alone, alone,
She who had loved and known
On other nights like this
Strong arms about her and many a kiss
And words of gentle tone.

Alone, alone, alone,
A woman she had known
Like a figure carved from stone
Held a letter in her hand
She scarce could understand
Of words which hardly could be read
“Goodbye—There is nothing to be said.”

Ah ! God, if she had known.

Alone, alone, alone,
She who had longed for love by stealth
As a gold-mad miser longs for wealth
Or a poet longs for fame,
Her seared numb body had just an ache
For a pitiful pitiless last mistake
And the smirch upon her name.

VI

A shrill chill wind blew out of the West
As a young child wails for a Mother's breast,
It broke the swell and whitened each crest
And moaned “I come with a strange behest;
The dead are happier. They are at rest
Alone, alone, alone,

Each under a graven stone,
Where the poppies are red
In the homes of the dead
And their scarlet petals spill
And the seabirds scream
As they wheel and gleam
And the seawinds whistle shrill.
The dead are happy, for they are free
They have said farewell to misery,
Alone
Each under a stone ;
But the hearts which mourn for a faithless friend
Can never, never, never mend,
And so they break for friendship's sake
Alone, alone, alone."

VII

The sea wind blew like a wild lament
For loved ones dying or love mis-spent
And still in her hollow of sand and bent
She lay alone, alone,
And stared out into the keening blast
Not heeding the future or mourning the past,
For past and future were one.

VIII

Ah ! pity her, who needed it most—
But in the village along the coast
Are those who tremble and moan,
Seeming to wait alone

For a dreadful something unknown,
As the tempest travels gathering force
And sobs and howls and raves and roars
And laughs like a demon band,
And the great waves clamber into the bay
With voices triumphant which seem to say
"Hurrah! Hurrah! we have found a prey
But we seek another on land."

Ah! shivering fisherwife in your shawl,
Perhaps they have found a prey
Who leap and shout in the bay,
And you will weep for the grief of it all
For many and many a day.

IX

All night the moon peered wan and pale
Thro' rifts in a scudding storm-rent veil
O'er a moving mountainous waste.
All night did the climbers rear and roar
And fall with a crash upon the shore,
League on league of them coming in haste
Till they broke and leapt no more,
Leaping and shouting until they broke
Upon the screaming shore.
And the simple hardy fisherfolk
Kept watch and slept no more,
As the wicked wind raved down the street
With gouts of foam and slings of sleet
And battered at every door.

All night the tiles like chips of straw
Were borne, and the air was filled with the roar
Of the monstrous symphony.
But its music lulled as the morning came
And touched the East with a rosy flame,
And whitened a hard clear sky,
And the tide drew out far far to the sea
Which shouted less tumultuously,
Tho' its voices were heard for a sign,
As it beat upon the barrier rocks
With the baffled rage of the Equinox
In a spouting misty line.

X

After a night so fierce and foul
What wonder such a day?
The wind, which shrieked like a tortured soul
Last night across the bay,
Blew high and keen like a violin
And dashed the blue with spray.

After a night so mad and wild
An afternoon of blue,
Of glinting, winking, glad blue waters
And breakers only a few,
Of light and azure undefiled
With scarce a cloud in view.

And at the hour of evening prayer
Came three who roamed the shore,
The sea was older, colder, and greyer,
And moved and murmured more.

Amid the waste of heaven and sea
A body lay alone,
Half in a pool and half on the knee
Of an ancient mossy stone.

The sea had saved a poor little fool
From life and all its harms,
Her body lay in a lonely pool—
Not in a lover's arms.

And on her cheek the mask of peace
And on her lips the smile
Of those who mourn and find release,
Who know, not love, the vile.

The Wraith.

A pale wraith stood in the dim grey dawn
Beside his old love's bed
Wavering like a film of lawn
And wrang his hands and said,
"Oh! I have come to make my prayer
For I cannot take my rest
When I think of the red crown I called your hair
And the cold stone in your breast.

"Out of the eyeless hopeless dark
The nights that are black and grey
Never a moon or faint star-spark
Or a lonely glimmer of day.
Oh! my love, I have come, love,
From the ebony gates of death
For the sake of the red crown I called your hair
And the jasmine of your breath."

But his voice was lost like a mouse's scream
In a lonely empty house,
And the woman lay in a tender dream
Of love and orchard boughs,
Her cheeks were flushed and twice she sighed
As she turned upon her bed
And she had no thought for the thing that cried
Or the utterance of the dead.

The Two Murderers.

“ Yes, it was I that killed her
I did it with this knife,
Her that was more to me once . . .
Well, just the whole of my life.
Take me away and hide me,
Or kill me afore I’m mad . . .
It’s rummy to think of me hanging
Who was such a quiet lad.

“ I met her here on the tow-path,
Same as I used in May,
There wasn’t no moon yet, only
The scent of the new-mown hay,
And I says—well—I thought for a moment
The happy times was near,
‘ The light that shineth in darkness
Is the light of your eyes, my dear.’

“ Murder ! a court full of lawyers . . .
And justice guaranteed . . .
And the judge will hang the prisoner
‘ For a cowardly cruel deed.’ . . .
Murder !—excuse my laughing ! . . .
It’s a kind of catch in the breath . . .
‘ But there’s words more harsh than a rope is
And looks more bitter than death.’

“ Murder ! My Lud, if ever
Their ledgers are balanced true
102

Which of the pair? . . . Oh! I reckon
That she killed something too.
. . . Is it the scent of a woman's hair
Or the scent of new-mown hay? . . .
Don't stand there shaking and staring,
For God's sake take me away."

REFLECTIONS.

The Wind and the Hills.

We will carry our ills
To a height of the hills,
Lying down, lying still
In the lap of a hill.

The wind blowing keen
Shall again make us clean,
Both body and spirit ;
As it passes we shall hear it.

The time is of thunder
And fields new turned under,
Of budding and waking ;
Of thorn-blossom flaking.

Of longing and questing ;
Of carol and nesting ;
Of white birds on the wing
Over seas blue with spring.

But you read in the pages
Of the books of the sages,
And save that dark curtain
They know nothing certain,

Except that dark portal
Which waits all things mortal—
And conqueror or prophet
Comprehend no more of it.

Yet the wind travels so
That it surely must know ;
It has gone the world round
Till it came to our ground.

And the hills, which stood fast
Ere the first axe was cast
And have seen so much history,
May have fathomed the mystery.

But the hills on our borders
Are silent old warders,
And the winds which rejoice
No articulate voice.

Oh ! ye pure larger airs
Ye will scatter our cares—
Mighty bastions of ours,
Uplift that which cowers,

For behind your grave brows
Are a thousand strong “Nows—”
And the wind has a “must”
In its rude healthy gust.

How it braces and rightens
That wind to make Titans !
Its strenuous wooing
Says, “Up, lads, and doing.”
108

So leaving the high down
Like giants we stride down ;
While the valleys before us
Resound to our chorus.

Having been each a seer
To whom all things were near,
Not resenting or grieving
But simply believing.

The Happy Ones.

They awaited with head erect
Whatever fate could befall them ;
Tried but the good to recollect,
Cried for the truth to call them.
To be loved by the children of other suns
And send a message to find them,
This is the fate of the happiest ones
Tho' the mortar of life may grind them.
They were like swimmers breasting the waves
In the troughs of a stormy channel,
They are silent now in their lonely graves,
But the world has become the panel.
They wore the truth like a bridal dress
And sorrow like wedding apparel,
Tho' the placid laughed at their foolishness
And the cynic sneered from his barrel.
Or like the wandering Ishmaelites,
Who found no city to dwell in,
Whose lonely hearts ached for pleasant sights,
Whose graves were the places they fell in,
Rock their pillow and sand their bed,
As the sun of the desert paints them ;
The fierce kites screaming overhead,
And the hands of all men against them.
But a word goes out and over the earth,
From the silent burying-places,
Like a gentle rain in a land of dearth,
And lights up the tired faces.
It brings a roof and a sweet abode
To many a soul that is vagrant ;

Their names are blossoms along the road
And their lives are for ever fragrant.
We who sorrow are brothers of theirs,
Because of their beautiful sorrows,
Wheat will grow up among the tares,
And young corn grow in the furrows.

A Question.

Why do you prate to me
Of deeds unjust and just,
Moved by a story of good
Or a monstrous tale of crimes—
Me that can have no loves
But star-eyed queens long dust,
Me that can mourn no griefs
But the tears in poets' rhymes?

The Earth.

The Earth and her travail are ancient,
Her gods have but reigned for a while—
The moon-crowned Queen Astarte,
The barking god of the Nile.
Her temples were raised and builded,
And crumbled again to the dust—
Her worships have been and vanished—
But the heart of the Earth is just.

Aspirations.

For that Thou pointest further still
Than that dumb hand upon the hour
Nor givest the boon to sap the will,
I thank Thee, wise and tender power.

For that Thou givest my soul some pride,
Not grudging sorrow for a mate,
For this my wild and lovely bride
I thank Thee, just, compassionate.

For that Thou givest my soul some strength
Of that high strength which rules the stars,
To brave the time and wait the length,
I bless Thy name and kiss my scars.

Romance.

Know the decree that natures such as mine
Must clasp the World and find her half-divine,
Hyperion-souls which need no anodyne.
Once more, once more ye come, ye lovely shapes,
Voicing the magic "Ye are Gods, not Apes."
And oh ! the Glory over seas and capes.
In memory only !—What that memory gave
Of our young day, so brief and yet so brave,
Will lead us half reluctant to the grave.
Tho' it existed not—lived never—only came
From some vast depth of dateless woe and shame
Striving to give its high desire a name,
The glory dies not ; leaves us tired and still ;
We cannot follow, even if we will ;
The Afterglow ! Ah ! there—beyond the hill.

